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THE NAOJOTE CEREMONY

OF

THE PARSEES

BY

JIVANJI JAMSHEDJI MODI, B. A.

Kûstîk...dakhshak-î-Yazdâu bôndakîh nishâni-dîn farmân barashnîh.

(Dâdistân-î-Dînîk, Chap. XXXIX. 32)

The sacred thread...is a token of the service of the Yazatas and a sign of following the commandments of Religion.

PRINTED AT
THE FORT PRINTING PRESS
No. 1, Parsi Bazar Street, Fort,
BOMBAY.

1909

YB 22254

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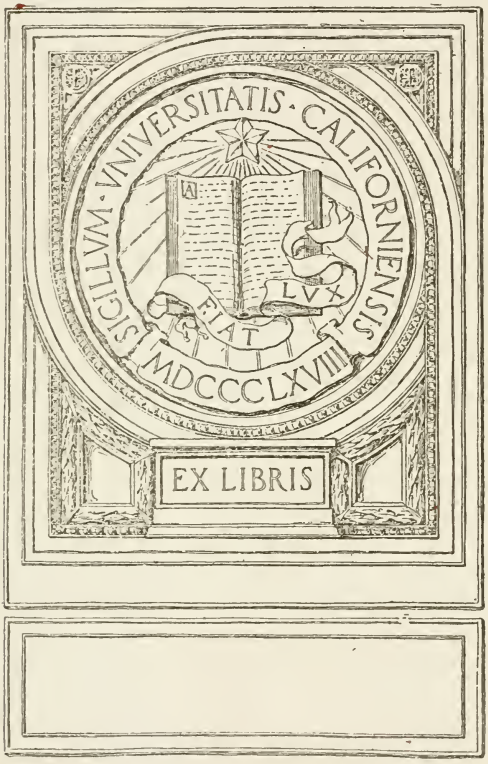

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To

THE SETH JEEJEEBHOY DADABHOY FAMILY

AS

A TOKEN OF RESPECT AND GRATITUDE

FOR THE FOUNDER OF THE FAMILY

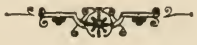
AND AS

A SOUVENIR OF THE SEVERAL OCCASIONS
ON WHICH I HAD THE PLEASURE OF
INITIATING SEVERAL YOUNG
MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY
INTO THE FOLD.

520503

PREFACE.

This paper is the result of a short study for a monograph on the subject of Naojote. It was, at first intended for the column of the "Zarthoshti," wherein, I had the pleasure of contributing several papers. But, owing to some delay in the publication of that periodical, I thought of publishing it in a separate form. Many a Parsee, now-a-days, invites non-Parsee guests to witness the ceremony, and so, a small brochure of this kind explaining the ceremony, is in demand. It is especially the second part of the paper that will be of some use for the purpose.



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THE NAOJOTE CEREMONY OF THE PARSEES.

I

SIGNIFICATION OF THE CEREMONY.

Naojote, the initiation of a Parsee Child into the fold of Zoroastrianism.

The initiation of a Parsee child into the fold of the Zoroastrian religion is known as Naojote. The ceremony of the initiation consists of the investiture of the child with a sacred shirt called *sudrah* and a sacred thread called *kusti*. A Zoroastrian may put on any dress he likes, but he must put on the sacred shirt and the thread as the symbol and badge of his religion.

Meaning of the word Naojote.

The word Naojote is made up of two words Nao (Avesta, *nava*; Sans. *nava* ; Lat. *novus*) new and Zote (Avesta *zaotar* from *zu*, Sans. *hu* to offer prayers) one who offers prayers. Hence, the word would mean a new initiate to offer Zoroastrian prayers. The ceremony is so named, because it is after its performance that a Zoroastrian child is said to be responsible for the duty of offering prayers and observing religious customs and rites as a Zoroastrian. The ceremony of Naojote among the Parsees, corresponds to that of ' Confirmation' among the Christians.

A Child's Age for this Ceremony.

Seven is the age, at which it is enjoined to initiate a child. According to Herodotus (Bk. I, 136) and Strabo (Bk. XV Chap. III, 18), the ancient Irânians commenced the education of their children at the age of five. It seems, that a part of that education was religious education, which prepared them, for the ceremony of the investiture. Plato (First Alcibiades,37) gives the age of education as seven. This, then, must be the regular age of the commencement of secular education after the Naojote ceremony. The Vendidâd (Chap. XV, 45) and the Dinkârd (Vol. IV Chap. 170) support Plato's statement.

In case a child is not sufficiently intelligent to understand the ceremony and to know its responsibilities, and in the case of some other unavoidable causes, it is permitted, that the ceremony can be postponed to any age upto fifteen, at which age the investiture must take place. A Zoroastrian without the sacred shirt and thread after the age of fifteen is supposed to be out of the fold and to fall into evil paths (Vendidâd XVIII 54).[1] The Sad-dar (Chap. X 1) says, that " It is incumbent on all those of the good religion, women and men, every one who attains to fifteen years, to wear the sacred thread-girdle, because the sacred thread-girdle is to be a girding of the loins and to preserve obedience to the Lord."[2] If

[1] S. B.E. (The Sacred Books of the East) Vol. IV. (1880) p. 199.

[2] S. B. E. Vol. XXIV p. 268. Vide also Chap. XLVI, 1. Ibid p. 309. Shâyast lâ Shâyast, Chap. X, 13 (S. B. E. Vol. V. p. 321).

one does not put on the sacred shirt and thread by the age of fifteen, he is said to commit the sin of *kushâd darârashni* (*i. e.* running about improperly clothed).[3]

With the age, at which the child must be invested with the sacred shirt and thread, begins the responsibility of the parents to give good religious and moral education to their children. The parents are held morally responsible, if they fail in this duty, and if, in consequence, the child, commits a wrongful act. On the other hand, the parents are believed to have a share in the meritoriousness of the child's act, if, by virtue of the religious and moral education imparted to it, it does a righteous act.

The Sacred Bath.

As the occasion is an important one, and, as it marks an important stage, in the life of the child, it is looked at, with all solemnity. A little before the time of the ceremony proper, the child is made to go through a sacred bath or a kind of purification, known as *Nân* (Sans. *snân i. e.* a bath). The sacred ceremonial bath with consecrated water in the Naojote and marriage ceremonies, has the same signification among the Parsees, as that, which, the bath with the sacred water of the spring of Calirhoe (or Enneacrunos) had among the ancient Athenians, or that which the bath with the sacred water of Ismenus had among the Thebans.

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[3] Minokherad II, 35 (S. B. E. Vol. XXIV p. 11). Virâfnâmeh XXV, 6. Patet 10.

After the bath, the child is taken to the room, where the parents, their relations and friends, and the officiating priest with one or more priests have assembled. The part of the child's body, which is to be covered with the sacred shirt, by the officiating priest, carries a sheet of cloth which can be easily removed. The child is made to sit before the officiating priest.

Preparations for the ceremony. The following things are placed in the room before the officiating priest.

1. A new set of clothes for the child, including a new sacred shirt and thread.

2. A tray-full of rice, which, at the end of the ceremony, is presented to the family priest. It is a remnant of the old system when a part of the payment to the priest was made in kind.

3. A tray-full of flowers, to be presented, at the end of the ceremony, to the assembled guests.

4. A lighted lamp, generally a lamp burning with clarified butter. There may be one or more candle lamps.

5. Fire, burning on a censer, with fragrant sandal wood and frank-incense.

6. A tray, containing a mixture of rice, pomegranate grains, small slices of cocoa-nut, raisins and almonds, to be sprinkled,

later on, on the child as a symbol of prosperity.

The tray, containing the suit of clothes for the child also contains some beetle leaves, beetle nuts, a few pieces of sugar candy, a few grains of rice, a garland of flowers, a metallic cup, containing, *kunku* or a kind of red powder and a few Rupees. All these things have nothing to do with the religious ceremony, but, being considered in India, as emblems of good luck, are handed to the child later on by the officiating priest.

II

THE CEREMONY PROPER OF THE INVESTITURE.

Now we will describe the ceremony itself as performed by the officiating priest.

The Recital of the Patet.

The officiating priest places in the hand of the child seated before him, the sacred shirt with which he is shortly to invest the child. He then recites the *Patet* or the repentance prayer. The child also recites the prayer or its special sections. If it does not know these by heart, it recites several times the Ahunavar, which is a short sacred formula, corresponding, to some extent, to the *Paternoster* of the Christians. At the conclusion of the Patet, the officiating priest gets up from his seat and makes the child stand before him. Now, follows the investiture proper.

The Investiture proper.

The Investiture proper is made up of four parts.

1. The recital of the Declaration of Faith by the child at the instruction of the priest.

2. The recital of the *Nirang-i-kusti* or the *Ahura Mazda Khodai* prayer.

3. The final recital of the Articles of Faith by the child with the priest.

4. The recital of the *Tan-daructi* prayer by the priest.

1. The Declaration of Faith and the Investiture with the Shirt.

The child is asked by the priest to make the Declaration of Faith as follows :

" Praised be the most righteous, the wisest, the most holy and the best Mazdayaçnân Law, which is the gift of Mazda. The good, true, and perfect religion, which God has sent to this world, is that which Prophet Zoroaster has brought in here. That religion is the religion of Zoroaster, the religion of Ahura Mazda communicated to holy Zoroaster."

This declaration ends with the short prayer-formula of *Ashem Vohu*, which says that "Righteousness is the best gift and happiness. Happiness to him who is righteous for the best righteousness."

When the child finishes the declaration, the officiating priest, with the recital of an *Ahunavar* prayer, puts on over the child the sacred shirt.

2. The Investiture with the Sacred Thread and the Recital of its Prayer.

The officiating priest now stands behind the child, both facing the East, if it is morning, and the West, if it is evening. He now recites a prayer, in the recital of a part of which the child joins him. The substance of the prayer which is recited by the priest and the child together runs thus :

" The Omniscient God is the greatest Lord. Âhriman is the evil spirit, that keeps back the advancement of the world. May that Evil Spirit with all his accomplices remain fallen and dejected. O Omniscient Lord ! I repent of all my sins. I repent of all the evil thoughts that I may have entertained in my mind, of all the evil words that I may have spoken, of all the evil actions that I may have performed. May Ahura Mazda be praised. May Âhriman, the evil spirit, be condemned. The will of the righteous is the most praise-worthy."

During the recital of this prayer, the priest invests the child with the sacred thread.

3. The Recital of the Articles of Faith by the Child.

The child, being thus invested with the sacred shirt and thread, now announces, with the priest, the articles of the Zoroastrian faith, which run thus :

" O Almighty ! Come to my help. I am a worshipper of God. I am a Zoroastrian worshipper of God. I agree to praise the Zoroastrian religion, and to believe in that religion. I praise good thoughts, good words, and good actions. I praise the good

Mazdayaçnân religion which curtails discussions and quarrels, which brings about kinship or brotherhood, which is holy, and which, of all the religions that have yet flourished, and are likely to flourish in the future, is the greatest, the best, and the most excellent, and which is the religion given by God to Zoroaster. I believe that all good things proceed from God. May the Mazda-yaçnân religion be thus praised."

The most important part of these Articles of Faith is that wherein the child is made to believe in the efficacy of one's own good thoughts, good words and good acts. A Parsee has to believe that, for the salvation of his soul, he has to look to nobody else, but to himself. Nobody—no priest, or no prophet—will intercede for him. For his salvation, he has only to look to the purity of his own thoughts, words, and actions. The pivot, on which the whole of the moral structure of Zoroastrianism turns, rests upon this triad of good thoughts, good words and good deeds. Think of nothing but the right thing, speak nothing but the truth, and do nothing but what is proper, and you are saved.

4. The Recital of the Tan-daructi or Benediction.

The investiture of the sacred shirt and thread, and the declaration of the Articles of Faith by the child, finish the ceremony proper. There only remains now the recital of the *Tan-daruçti* (lit. health of the body) or the Benediction by the officiating priest, invoking the bless-

ings of God upon the new initiate. The purport of what he says in this recital is this: "May you enjoy health, long life and splendour of piety. May the Yazatas and the Amesha Spentas come to your help. May the religion of Zoroaster flourish. O Almighty God! May you bestow long life, joy and health upon the ruler of our land, upon the whole community and upon this . . . . . * May he (or she) live long to help the virtuous. May his days be auspicious, his months be auspicious, his years be auspicious. May he live for a good number of years to lead a holy, charitable and religious life. May he perform righteous deeds. May health, virtue and goodness be his lot. May all his good wishes be fulfilled like those of the immortal angels. Amen!"

This finishes the whole ceremony. The officiating priest and the other priests are then paid their fees and the assembled guests have flowers presented to them.

III

THE SYMBOLISM OF THE SACRED SHIRT AND THREAD.

We now come to the third part of our subject. We will now see what the symbolism of the sacred shirt and thread is. It is not to the Avesta, but to later books, that we have to look to, for an explanation of this symbolism.

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* Here he names the child.

Sudreh-Meaning of the word.

The sacred shirt is called *sudreh* or *sudrah*. The word is variously derived. Anquetil Du Perron says, that the word *sudrah* comes from Zend '*setêhr pêesehenghé*' which means 'useful clothing'.[1] Anquetil's derivation is that of the old Dasturs of Surat under whom he learnt. Dastur Edalji D. Sanjânâ also derives the word similarly,[2] and says further, that the word *Sud-reh* means an advantageous path. Dr. West[3] takes the word to be persian '*sud-rah*', meaning an advantageous path. Some derive the word from Avesta '*vastra*' meaning 'clothing', and say, that the word '*sadreh*' is formed by dropping the first letter *v* from it.[4] The late Mr. K. E. Kanga said that the word was the same as Arabic سدرة *i. e.* "anything which covers or protects (the body)."

The structure of the shirt.

The sacred shirt is symbolic in its stucture. It is made of white cambric. White colour is symbolic of innocence and purity, and, as such, is the symbol of the Mazdayaçnân or Zoroastrian religion (Yasht X, Meher, 126). It must be made up of two pieces of cloth sewn together on the sides, so that one seam may be on the right hand side and the other on the left hand side, thus

(1) "Tapis (étoffe) utile." Zend Avesta Tome II p. 529.

(2) Mojijât-i-Zarthushti.

(3) S. B. E. Vol. V p. 286.

(4) The Zend Avesta, par Darmesteter II p. 243 n. 13.

dividing the shirt into two parts, the front part and the back part. These two parts—the front and the back—are said to be symbolic of the past and the future, both related to each other through the present.

The front part must remind a Zoroastrian of his duty to persons and institutions of the past ages. We owe a duty towards those who have gone before us—to our ancestors, our forefathers, our departed dear ones, all who have preceded us. We also owe a duty to our superiors, who have been in the front before us.

The second or the back part of the shirt must remind us of our duty to the future—to our children, to future generations. It must also remind us of our duty to our inferiors who are still to rise to our position. In short, these two parts of the shirt—the front and the back—are said to indicate and to say to us, as it were : " Look straight in the front, bearing in mind, that it is the past that has come up to the present and will lead to the future."

The Gireh-ban of the shirt.

The most important part of the shirt is the *gireh-bân* (lit. that which preserves the knot) which signifies loyalty to or faith in the religion. The *Gireh-bân* is also called the *kisseh-i-kerfeh i. e.* the purse or the bag of righteousness. It is put up, in the form of a bag or a purse, a little below the portion of the shirt which covers the part of the body below the throat. It in-

dicates symbolically that a man has to be industrious and has not only to fill his bag or purse with money but has to fill it up with righteousness.

Thus the *sudrah* is symbolic of purity of life and action, and of righteoutness.

Kusti:- Meaning of the word.

The Avesta word of the sacred thread is "*aiwyaônghana*". Kusti is its later Pahlavi rendering.

It is variously derived,

(*a*) Some derive it from Pahlavi *kosht* meaning direction. So, the word may mean "that which points out to us the proper direction or path". *Sudreh* (the sacred shirt) indicates "advantageous path" and *kusti* indicates the proper direction of that path.

(*b*) Some derive the word from *kosht i.e.* waist, and say that it is so called because it is put on, on the waist.

(*c*) Some take this word to be Persian '*kishti*' *i. e.* a ship, and say that it symbolizes a ship that carries us to the safe harbour of righteousness.

(*d*) But the probable derivation seems to be *kost i. e.* limit or boundary. *Kusti* then is that which keep us, or reminds us, to keep ourselves, within proper limits or boundaries. *Sudreh* or the sacred shirt symbolizes, "the path of righteousness" and *kusti* symbolizes one's duty to con-

fine himself within the proper limit of the path of righteousness. It indicates a direction in the path of morality. The Avesta word for *kusti* is, as said above "*aiwiyâonghana*", which literally means "to sit round about or to limit." This word then suggests that this last one is the probable derivation of the word '*kusti*.'

Kusti-Its structure and preparation.

The kusti is made of lamb's wool. The wool is at first combed and then spun into a fine thread. Two such threads are prepared on two spindles (*châtri*). These two threads are then twisted into one thread. The thread thus twisted or doubled is woven into a knot on a hand-loom (*jantar*). Seventy-two threads go to make up the kusti. The seventy-two threads are at first separated or divided into six parts or strands each of twelve threads It is considered to be the privilege of the women of the priestly class to weave the *kusti* and it is the privilege of priests to finally consecrate it before its ends are woven and finished. In the end, the *kusti*, which is hollow, is turned inside out by means of a needle, and then the remaining unwoven parts of the threads are knit together. Three *laris* or string-ends in the form of tassels, each of 24 threads, are formed at each end of the woven thread. So, at both the ends, there are, in all, six *laris*.

Symbolism and signification of the structure of the Kusti.

The Kusti, being prepared from the wool of a lamb, which is, in all ages, considered to be the emblem

of innocence and purity, is held to be a badge reminding a Zoroastrian of the purity of life and action which he has always to observe. The seventy-two threads, which make up the Kusti, symbolize the seventy-two chapters of the Yaçna which forms an important part of the liturgical prayers of the Parsis. The twenty-four threads, which make up each of the three tassel-like *laris* or string-ends of the *kusti*, symbolize the twenty-four sections, which were believed to make up the Visparad, another liturgical prayer. The six parts, or strands, each of twelve threads, into which the seventy-two threads of the *Kusti* are divided at the time of weaving, are said to symbolize the six religious or ceremonial duties of a Zoroastrian. The twelve threads in each of the above twelve parts and strands symbolize the twelve months of the year. The six *laris* or tassel-like string ends, three at each end of the *kusti*, symbolize the six *Gâhambârs* or the six season festivals of a Zoroastrian year. The hollow of the thread symbolizes the space between the earth and heaven, between this world and the next. The doubling or the twisting of the thread in the beginning symbolizes the connection between the present corporeal world and the future spiritual world. The two are so connected that what you will sow in this world you will reap in the other. The turning of the *kusti* inside out has a somewhat similar signification. It symbolizes the passage of the soul from this corporeal to that spiritual world. The weaving or the uniting together of all the threads into one,

symbolizes Universal union or Brotherhood. Though the explanation of the symbolism rests, not on any old Avesta books, but on later books, still it is clear, that the structure of the *kusti* had some symbolic signification like that of the cord worn by the Fransiscan fathers on their waist.

Kusti- a symbol from very ancient times.

Just as the cross is said to have existed as a symbol at times anterior to Christ, though Christ's crucifixion added to its signification, so, though Zoroastrianism added further significance to it, the *kusti* is said to have existed as a symbol prior to Zoroaster.

The Kusti, when to be tied and untied.

It is enjoined that, except at the time of bathing, a Zoroastrian must always have the sacred shirt and thread on his body. Again the thread is to be untied and re-girded several times during the day. The times are the following:—

(1) Immediately leaving one's bed in the morning.

(2) After ablutions and answering the calls of nature.

(3) Before saying prayers.

(4) After bath.

(5) Before meals.

A modern Parsee, sometimes neglects to do so on the first and fifth occasions out of the above five, but he generally observes the enjoinment on the 2nd, 3rd and 4th occasions.

When performing the ceremony, one always turns towards light[1]. In the morning, he turns towards the east. In the afternoon and in the evening, towards the west. At night towards a lamp or towards the moon.

How to put on the Kusti

A Parsee has to perform ablutions when he performs the Kusti ceremony on the above occasions. Having done so, he repeats a short prayer, unties it and then re-girds it with another short prayer known as *Nirang-i-Kusti* described above. It is passed round the waist three times with two knots, one in the front and another at the back.

Signification of the Knots

The knots are said to symbolize certain religious and moral thoughts. While forming the first half of the first knot in the front, a Zoroastrian must think that Ahura Mazda (God) exists, that He is one, is holy and is matchless. While forming the second half of the first knot, he must remember that the Zoroastrian religion is the Word of God and that he must have full faith in it. While forming the first half of the second knot at the back, he is to remember that Zoroaster is the prophet of God, that he is his guide and that he shows the proper path of worship. While forming the second half of the second knot, he is to bear in mind that he has always to attend to "Good thoughts, good words and good deeds."[2] A knot symbolizes a resolution. So these knots of the sacred

[1] The Dadestan-i-Dini Chap. XXXIX.

[2] The Sad-dar Chap. X.

thread symbolize resolutions for the above-said thoughts.

Kusti to be put on the waist

The Kusti is a kind of belt. Now, *Kamar-bastan i. e.* to tie the waist, or to put on the belt, is a phrase which has come to mean "to be ready for work." So, according to the Dadistân, the putting on of the *Kusti* on the waist, signifies that, the Zoroastrian who puts it on, thereby symbolizes his readiness to serve God. A person stands before his superior with his waist girded with a belt, to show, that he is ready to obey the orders of his master or superior. So, a Zoroastrian with waist girded by the belt of a Kusti shows his obedience to his Great Master.

Symbolic signification of tying the Kusti on the waist.

The Dadistân-i-Dini dwells at some length on the signification of tying the *kusti.* The purpot of what it says is this.

(1) Firstly, God wishes that Man should serve Him and follow His path. So, *Kusti* is a symbol, which, being tied on the waist, symbolizes, a man's readiness to serve God. It serves as a kind of *Kamar-band* or belt, which, being put on, in a solemn way, with religious meditation and prayer, reminds a person of his perpetual obligation to stand in the service of God.

(2) Secondly, a person, puts on the badge of his office or a belt, when he stands before

his superiors to receive orders. So, this sacred badge reminds a Zoroastrian to stand with all humiliation before his God to receive his orders to do his duty in the world.

(3) Thirdly, the knot is a kind of band (Persian *band) i.e.* a kind of shutter. A shutter shuts a thing, so that no outside influence may affect it nor its own influence affect an outside thing. The *Kusti* as a *band*, being tied on the waist, divides his self into two halves as it were, the lower half and the upper half. This division is looked at from a spiritual point of view, and it signifies, that the *Kusti*, as a symbol must suggest to a Zoroastrian the propriety of not permitting his lower passions, vices, and desires to get a mastery over him and to subdue his upper or higher self. He must keep down, below his belt, as it were, his unworthy thoughts and desires, and not let them have a mastery over his higher and nobler self.

આજ લખનારના બીજાં પુસ્તકો.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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Marriage Customs among the Parsees, their Comparison with similar Customs of other Nations.

The Parsees at the Court of Akbar and Dastur Meherji Rânâ.

Aîyâdgar-î Zarîrân, Shatrôîhâ-î- Aîrân, va Afdya va Sahîgîya-î Sîstân, *i.e.*, The Memoir of Zarîr, Cities of Irân, and the Wonders and Marvels of Seistân (Pahlavi Translations, Part I. Texts in Gujarati character, with English and Gujarâti translations and notes.)

Jâmâspî (Pahlavi Translations, Part III. Pahlavi, Pâzend and Persian texts with translations).

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Gujarati. ગુજરાતી.

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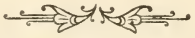

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